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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in three city school districts in eastern North Carolina to examine the relationship between the organizational climate of elementary schools and the reading achievement of third grade students. The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire was given to the staff of ten elementary schools to determine whether the school was "open" or "closed." Reading achievement measures for the students were obtained from the California Achievement Test, and academic ability measures were obtained from the California Short Form Test of Academic Ability. A comparative analysis of the data indicated a significant difference in reading achievement between "open" and "closed" school environments, and revealed that students enrolled in the school with an "open" organizational climate performed significantly better on two of the reading indices than those students who were enrolled in the "closed" organizational climate school. (HTH)

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The Relationship Between the Organization Climate of Elementary Schools and Reading Achievement of Third Grade Pupils.

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The Relationship Between the Organizational Climate of Elementary Schools and Reading Achievement of Third Grade Pupils.

Schools are composed of people. They are staffed with people working to facilitate learning on the part of others, namely, students. Because schools are more than buildings, grounds, and equipment, because they are people organizations, they tend to have a "personality" of their own. This "personality" is also described by others as the feel, tone, culture, and organizational climate of the school.

Andrew Halpin (1966), a pioneering researcher in the field of climatology within the school alluded to this tone or "feel" of the school by stating that:

> Anyone who visits more than a few schools notes quickly how schools differ from each other in their "feel." . . . As one moves to other schools, one finds that each appears to have a "personality" of its own. It is this "personality" that we describe here as the "organizational climate" of the school. Analogously, personality is to the individual what organizational climate is to the organization.

The theory has been advanced that how an individual performs in an educational organization is determined at least in part by (1) the kind of individual one is, and (2) by the setting, tone, or climate of the organization (Hoy and Miskel, 1978).

There are numerous groups and individuals within the groups found in schools. A partial listing would include students, teachers, aides, custodians, and administrators. As the individual and organizational

dimensions of the social system are balanced, the end product is the organizational climate of the school (Hoy and Miskel). In this frame of reference, organizational climate appears to be directly associated with the interrelationship between the school administrator and those affected by the leadership, positive or negative, of this individual.

The implications of this assessment for the instructional leader of the school, the principal, are tremendous. It is this individual, perhaps more than anyone else, who sets the tone and basic direction or the school. The principal, acting as the professional leader, is in a highly unique position to accelerate or stifle effective teacher-pupil relationships and learning. In an apparent reference to this phenomena, a joint committee of noted educators was led to declare that:

> . . . the professional leader reflects the hopes, the professional beliefs, and the considered judgement of the staff, his spirit, his values, and his administrative skill, and his overall leadership make for success or failure. The educational leader is a key factor in encouraging teachers to experiment, to invent new ways of finding the peculiarly different attributes and interests of learners, and to new ways of stimulating and releasing the creative potential of pupils (N. E. A., 1965).

Professional leaders such as school principals may, in the persuance of their duties, be using nonmotivating or dissatisfying approaches in dealing with fellow professionals. They frequently may not be cognizant of their own behavior and the effect of this behavior upon their associates (Timmirck, 1977). Frederick Herzberg and others (1959) have pointed out

that as members of our society, people are accustomed to being happy or unhappy. While there are factors which tend to minimize dissatisfaction or unhappiness with work, these factors do not, in and of themselves, bring about happiness.

Timmirck (1977) believes that some of the factors which cause dissatisfaction and unhappiness among teachers is the feeling of being treated unfairly or of having to deal with unpleasant and painful situations on an ongoing basis. Principals should carefully consider the effect upon teachers of hygenic factors such as school rules and policies as well as the supervision of teachers by themselves and other supervisors. Teachers need positive motivation from the principal to the extent that they can achieve success and be recognized. But for this experience to take place, there must be exhibited a relationship of mutual trust and respect. This feeling furthermore, must be communciated openly and on an ongoing basis. Some principals excel in this endeavor while others leave something to be desired.

Tagiuri and Litwin (1968) as well as others propose that as the climate of a school becomes more open (i.e., the teachers feel less hindered in performing their tasks, display greater esprit, and become more intimate with their fellow colleagues), the effectiveness of the teacher will be increased and therefore the pupils' reading achievement will also experience more rapid growth. This teacher behavior, ccupled with an administrator who guides the organization toward specific goals in a firm, informal but considerate manner, also has been associated with a productive "open" climate organization. The opposite of these characteristics has been associated with "closed" climates; and their influence, it is assumed, acts as a deterent to pupil progress.

This study has two major objectives: first, to ascertain whether the organizational climate of a school can be determined and the school placed on a continuum from "open to closed" and, secondly to determine if there is a significant difference between the reading achievement of third grade pupils who are enrolled in schools that are classified as "open," "closed," or occupying an intermediate position on an organizational continuum.

Method

Subjects. Three city school districts in Eastern North Carolina were chosen to participate in this study. Within these districts there were twelve elementary schools that enrolled third grade pupils. Of the possible twelve schools, two principals, for unknown reasons, requested that they not be included in the study, thereby decreasing the sample to ten elementary schools enrolling 835 third grade pupils. The schools that did participate were similar in size with two having an instructional staff of 13, seven employing 20-22 teachers, and one having a staff of 24. All of the schools were located in cities with populations less than 35,000 and the racial balances, pupil teacher ratios, and socio-economic levels of the units were similar. The two schools which chose not to participate were similar to the schools which remained in the study and no deviant characteristics were observable.

Design and Procedure

During the spring of 1979 each of the ten elementary schools was visited by one of the researchers and the purposes of the study were discussed with the instructional staff of each school. At this meeting the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Halpin), hereafter

referred to as the OCDQ, was administered to the staff without the presence of the school's principal, to determine how the teachers would describe the organizational climate of their school.

The OCDQ consists of sixty-four Likert-type items which are phrased as questions aimed at gaining knowledge about two major factors which have been conceptualized as descriptors of the organizational climate of the school, namely (1) teacher behavior and (2) principal behavior. Each of these groups are further subdivided into four areas as follows (Halpin):

Teacher Behavior

1. Disengagement refers to the teacher's tendency to go through the motions, to be "not with it."
2. Hinderance refers to the teacher's feeling that he is burdened with routine duties and busy work.
3. Esprit refers to morale.
4. Intimacy refers to the teacher's enjoyment of friendly relations with one another.

Principal Behavior

5. Aloofness refers to behavior by the principal which is characterized as formal and impersonal, "going by the book."
6. Production Emphasis refers to behavior by the principal that is characterized by close supervision, communication going in only one direction and insensitivity to staff needs.
7. Thrust refers to behavior by the principal to move the organization forward, not through close supervision, but through motivation of the teachers by example.
8. Consideration refers to the principal treating teachers humanely.

After administering and scoring the OCDQ according to the procedures outlined by Halpin, reading achievement measures, i.e., reading vocabulary, comprehension and total reading performance, were obtained from the California Achievement Test, Level 13. Academic ability measures were also obtained from the California Short Form Test of Academic Ability and only those pupils for whom both measurements were available, 801, were included in the study.

The data obtained from the OCDQ was then evaluated and a total organizational climate score was obtained by summing each of standardized scores (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) for each of the eight organizational variables. When developing this total organizational indice, it is important that the reader notice that the signs on the scores obtained on the Disengagement, Hinderance, Aloofness and Production Emphasis variables were reversed. Each of the schools was then classified into one of three categories, with the school receiving the highest score being designated as "open," the lowest score "closed" and the remaining eight schools classified in an "intermediate" position.

An analysis of covariance statistical procedure (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, and Brent, 1975) was used to determine if there were a significant difference ($p. < .05$) among the schools for each of the aforementioned reading variables after the effects of academic ability had been removed. T-tests were then used to determine which adjusted means were significantly different. The use of the t-tests for multiple comparisons were only used on measures that were expected to differ before the experimental data had been collected (Bruning and Kintz, 1977).

Results

One of the major purposes of this study was to ascertain whether the ten schools could be classified on an "open-closed" continuum using the results of the OCDQ. The data obtained from the OCDQ is presented in Table 1 and the scores obtained on each of the organizational variables have been "added" to produce an overall score. Inspection of this data leads one to conclude that the climate of a school can be quantified and that school F can be classified as the most "open" climate school because of teacher behavior that reflects relatively low disengagement -.12; high morale, .41, second highest; very little hinderance, -.45; and a principal's behavior that is low in production emphasis -.49; high in thrust, .33; and high in consideration for his staff, .12, yielding a total climate score of 2.61. School J, however, has been classified as the school which best exemplifies a "closed" organizational climate. The morale is the lowest, -1.28; and the behavior of the principal is characterized as low production emphasis, i.e. close supervision -1.00; very low thrust -1.26; and little consideration for the staff, -.56, yielding a total climate score of -2.90. The remaining schools were placed in an intermediate position with respect to the total organizational climate indicator.

Insert Table 1 about here.

The second purpose, after that of identifying school climate, was to ascertain whether there was a difference between the reading performance of third grade pupils in the "open" versus the "closed" organizational schools.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of covariance for each of the reading performance indicators, vocabulary, comprehension, and total reading, after the effects of academic ability have been removed. Inspection of this table reveals that there was a significant difference among the schools for each of the reading behaviors under investigation.

Further analysis was performed using the t-test to ascertain which mean scores were significantly different. Prior to the collection of the experimental data, it was hypothesized that the "open" climate schools would produce greater reading achievement in third grade pupils than a schools which could be classified as "closed." Table 3 presents the adjusted mean scores after the effects of academic ability had been removed and the results of the t-tests that were hypothesized.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Inspection of Table 3 indicates that there is a significant difference between School F, the school which best exemplified an "open" school, and School J, the "closed" climate school when one compares reading vocabulary and total reading achievement ($p. < .01$). However, when one compares reading comprehension scores, there is not a significant difference between the schools. Further analysis reveals that when one compares School F with School I, the school receiving the second lowest organizational climate score, there is a significant difference between the schools when one considers reading comprehension ($p. < .01$) but not when one considers

reading vocabulary and total reading achievement. Similar findings are revealed when one compares School A, the school receiving the second highest organizational climate score, with Schools J and I. The pupils in School A performed significantly better than the pupils in School J when one considers reading vocabulary and total reading achievement ($p. < .05$) but not when one considers the reading comprehension achievement. When one compares the pupils in School A with the pupils in School I, a significant difference occurs when one compares reading comprehension scores ($p. < .01$) but no differences occur when one compares vocabulary and total reading achievement.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that schools can be categorized on an "open-closed" continuum and that the students enrolled in the school that best exemplified an "open" organizational climate performed significantly better on two of the reading indices than those students who were enrolled in the "closed" organizational climate school. These findings agree with the theoretical perspective of many "humanistically" oriented supervisors and administrators (Swearingen, Kubie) who stress the importance of an environment which allows instructors to direct their full psychic energy to the teaching-learning process, rather than diverting limited energy supplies to protecting oneself. These findings, however, are in direct contradiction to similar studies (Panushka, 1970 and Reilly, 1973). This contradiction can partially be explained by the fact that this study did not rely totally upon data from schools and teachers where they had the opportunity to choose to reply to the OCDQ instrument if they so desired. Secondly, the schools represented in this study did represent schools at both ends of an "open" and the "closed" continuum.

The evaluation and placement of schools on an "open-closed" continuum however must be further refined. If one were to classify the schools in this study by utilizing only the variables of disengagement, morale and thrust, variables which Halpin feels are very important, the results would vary significantly from those presented in this study. Additional examination of the data also seems to indicate that thrust may be a better predictor of reading achievement than morale, a finding that would be quite uncomfortable for many supervisors and administrators who stress a human relations approach to achieving the best teaching-learning environment. Also, there did not seem to be any significant differences between school size and the occurance of an open or closed organizational climate.

The results support the claim that there is a positive relationship between the organizational climate of a school, the more "open" the climate, the greater the pupil achievement. However, when one looks at the comparisons made among the schools, one notices that the findings of this study do not fully support the hypothesis that pupils enrolled in "open" climate schools will perform better than pupils enrolled in "closed" climate schools. Although the pupils enrolled in Schools A and F performed better than pupils enrolled in School J, these differences were only noticed with respect to vocabulary and total reading achievement but not with respect to reading comprehension. This finding indicates that achievement in this area is related to other causes rather than the "open-closed" climate variable under study. This study also indicates that when there is quite a large difference between schools, F and J, 5.51, and A and J, 4.92, on the organizational climate scale, one can expect to observe significant differences in the reading performance of pupils; but when the differences become less, i.e. F and I, 4.48, and A

and I, 3.89, the observed differences in the reading performance of pupils begin to be minimized. This decrease in the differences may help to explain why Schools A and F performed better than School J on the reading measures, but not School I. Although this study indicates that the relationship between the organizational climate of a school and the reading performance of third graders is in a positive direction, the effects of organizational climate should not be overemphasized. An "open" climate school may assist teachers to perform in an exemplary fashion, but the climates' effects should not be exaggerated. Additional studies with a much larger sample should be attempted and the utilization of a multiple regression technique would assist educators to measure the effects of Halpin's organizational factors on pupil's reading achievement and also assist educators to determine how much difference is needed between "open" and "closed" climate schools in order to influence reading achievement.

Table 1

Organizational Climate of Elementary Schools Enrolling Third Grade Students

School	Disengagement	Hinderance	Esprit	Intimacy	Aloofness	Production Emphasis	Thrust	Consideration	Total
A	-.28	-.18	.20	.32	-.32	-.41	.15	.17	2.02
B	.45	-.12	.56	.65	-.15	-.12	.16	.40	1.71
C	.02	-.03	.29	.54	-.29	-.13	-.03	.56	1.97
D	.48	.72	-.05	-.29	-.12	-.34	.47	.09	-.59
E	.50	-.18	.10	-.45	-.26	-.04	.15	.22	-.44
F	-.12	-.45	.41	.17	-.52	-.49	.33	.12	2.61
G	.18	.03	.32	-.21	-.27	-.30	-.10	-.02	.55
H	-.44	.04	.32	.44	1.30	1.40	.62	.21	-.71
I	.03	-.19	-.71	-.37	-.01	-.28	-.66	-.58	-1.87
J	-.09	.20	-1.28	-.56	.13	-1.00	-1.26	-.56	-2.90

Table 2

Analysis of Covoriance: Comparison of Schools on Reading Performance*

	Source	df	Adjusted MS	F
Reading Vocabulary				
	Schools	9	9877.3	7.86**
	Error	790	1257.1	
Reading Comprehension				
	Schools	9	6274.1	5.60**
	Error	790	1118.82	
Total Reading				
	Schools	9	14963.8	12.44**
	Error	790	1202.5	

*Academic ability test scores are covariate factors.
**p. < .01

Table 3

Adjusted Reading Achievement of Elementary Schools and Selected t-tests

School	Adjusted Reading Scores Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total Reading	Climate
A	410.13	420.99	408.60	
B	402.37	417.67	406.13	
C	394.05	416.95	395.11	
D	408.27	421.96	408.55	
E	397.15	417.79	399.07	
F	410.54	423.11	408.99	OPEN
G	432.12	440.10	429.76	
H	399.26	415.37	397.62	
I	404.16	402.29	402.82	
J	396.36	417.80	392.78	CLOSED

t-tests Performed on Selected Schools

Reading Vocabulary

School F vs. School J: Difference = 14.58 (c.diff. = 10.01) p. < .01
School F vs. School I: Difference = 6.38 (c.diff. = 10.55) not significant
School A vs. School J: Difference = 13.77 (c.diff. = 10.70) p. < .02
School A vs. School I: Difference = 5.97 (c.diff. = 11.19) not significant

Reading Comprehension

School F vs. School J: Difference = 5.31 (c.diff. = 9.44) not significant
School F vs. School I: Difference = 20.82 (c.diff. = 9.93) p. < .01
School A vs. School J: Difference = 3.19 (c.diff. = 10.09) not significant
School A vs. School I: Difference = 18.70 (c.diff. = 10.56) p. < .01

Total Reading

School F vs. School J: Difference = 16.21 (c.diff. = 9.80) p. < .001
School F vs. School I: Difference = 4.17 (c.diff. = 10.32) not significant
School A vs. School J: Difference = 15.82 (c.diff. = 10.47) p. < .05
School A vs. School I: Difference = 5.59 (c.diff. = 10.96) not significant

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